

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 15-42

THE BOSTON GLOBE MAGAZINE
29 March 1981

THE INDIA YEARS:

POWER FROM AFAR

THE MEMOIRS OF JOHN KENNEDY: PART ONE

John Kenneth Galbraith was not always an adviser to Presidents and a seer to be reckoned with in economic and political matters. He was born seventy-two years ago on a farm in Canada, graduated from Ontario Agricultural College, and went to work in the lower reaches of the Department of Agriculture during the Depression.

*If success came early — by 1941 he was administering price controls under FDR (where one of his employees was a young man named Richard Nixon) — Galbraith soon developed the knack of keeping success in perspective. A casualty of wartime bureaucratic maneuvers in Washington, he went on to a second career in journalism before returning to academia as a professor of economics at Harvard. While there, in 1958, he published his best-known work, *The Affluent Society*.*

In 1960, Galbraith was on intimate terms with two contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination, Adlai Stevenson and John Kennedy, and friendly with a third, Lyndon Johnson, as readers will learn next week.

*As Part One of the excerpt of Galbraith's forthcoming memoir, *A Life in Our Times*, opens, Kennedy has been elected President and is about to make his friend, not an eminently vulnerable chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers close to home, but an eminently removed yet unusually influential ambassador to India.* —Ed.

By John Kenneth Galbraith

President Kennedy was pleased to have me in his administration as he took office in 1961, but at a suitable distance, such as in India. This saved him from a too close identification with my extensively articulated economic views. At his very first press conference in Los Angeles after his nomination in 1960, he was asked if he and the Democratic party could now be considered committed to the ideas in my book *The Affluent Society*. He evaded with skill and grace. A few days after the election he asked Arthur Schlesinger if I wanted to be chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers. Schlesinger mentioned my interest in India. Kennedy, Arthur said afterward, seemed far from distressed.

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On March 27, 1961, shortly before departing for India, I had lunch at the Metropolitan

Club in Washington with G. Lewis Jones, a foreign service officer of conservative temperament, then the assistant secretary of state for Near East and South Asian affairs. He told me that he considered past or intended CIA activities in India a blot on the democratic processes we praised and affirmed. He urged me to inform myself and bring them to an end. Lewis Jones was a good man.

Two mornings later I had a briefing on intelligence operations in India by the CIA. Richard M. Bissell, Jr., joined it and showed me a paper with the proposed budget for the coming year. Bissell was an economist of ability and intelligence and an early Keynesian, who, in the New Deal days, had held himself aloof from the political enthusiasms of the time. Keynes was one thing; liberal politics was something else. In consequence, his professional competence, combined with his inner conservatism, made him highly acceptable to the businessmen who were associated in later years with the Marshall Plan, and he was a particularly influential figure in its management and success. He went on to join Allen Dulles in the belief that communism anywhere called for an automatic and often unthinking response and that a system so evil allowed of any indecency in return.

Bissell that morning must have been taking time off from the final stages of the planning of the Bay of Pigs operation, if anything that anarchic could be said to have been planned. He was deputy director of the CIA for plans, this being the euphemism for clandestine operations or what, optimistically, were assumed so to remain.

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